

**Amendments to the Claims:**

This listing of claims replaces all prior versions, and listings, of claims in the application:

1. (currently amended) A method for installing tiles on a vertical support surface, comprising the steps of:

providing a device having an elongate, straight configuration;

mounting on said device a spirit level having a bubble;

forming in said device a plurality of longitudinally spaced apart openings;

axially misaligning the openings with respect to one another to maintain structural integrity of the device;

said openings collectively extending an entire extent of said device so that said device may be affixed to a stud behind said vertical support surface without limitation relating to the location of the stud;

adapting each of said openings to accommodate a fastener means;

providing a tile support surface along an upper edge of said device;

making an elongate level marker mark on said vertical support surface at a predetermined location thereon;

positioning said tile support surface of said device in abutting, overlying relation to said vertical support surface in registration with said mark and rotating said device against said vertical support surface until said spirit level indicates that said tile support surface is coincident with said elongate level marker horizontal;

fastening said device to said vertical support surface by inserting a fastener means through at least two of said openings;

installing a lowermost row of tiles on said vertical support surface such that said lowermost row of tiles is supported by said tile support surface;

removing said fastener means after said tile installation is complete; and

removing said device from said overlying relation to said vertical support surface;

whereby said lowermost row of tiles in said tile installation is level; and

whereby subsequent rows of tiles using said lowermost row of tiles as a foundation are also level.

2. (canceled)

3. (canceled)

4. (canceled)

5. The method of claim 1, further comprising the steps of:

forming a first releasable coupler in a first end of said device;

forming a second releasable coupler in a second end of said device;

adapting said first releasable coupler to releasably engage said second releasable coupler so that two of said devices may be releasably coupled to one another in end-to-end relation by releasably coupling said first releasable coupler at a first end of a first device to the second releasable coupler at a second end of a second device.

6. The method of claim 1, further comprising the steps of:

dimensioning a base of said device to have a first predetermined depth;

dimensioning said tile support surface to have a second predetermined depth greater than said first predetermined depth;

forming said base and tile support surface so that they share a common flat back wall adapted to abuttingly engage said vertical support surface;

sizing said second predetermined depth so that it is approximately equal to a combined thickness of a tile and of a layer of adhesive underlying said tile.

7. The method of claim 1, further comprising the steps of:

forming a plurality of notches in said device along the extent thereof;

forming each notch of said plurality of notches so that it has a depth only slightly less than a depth of said device;

bending said device at said notches so that said device overlies a convex wall.

8. The method of claim 1, further comprising the steps of:

forming a plurality of notches in said device along the extent thereof;

forming each notch of said plurality of notches so that it has a depth only slightly less than a depth of said device;

bending said device at said notches so that said device overlies a concave wall.

9-16. (canceled)